



# THE MAIDS OF PARADISE

By  
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"Maids-at-Arms," etc.

Illustrations  
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(Continued from last week)

## SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Scarlett, an American soldier of fortune in the employ of the French Imperial Police, is ordered to arrest John Buckhurst, a leader of the Communists, who is suspected of having stolen the French crown jewels. While searching for Buckhurst, Scarlett is ordered to arrest Countess de Vassart and her group of socialists and escort them to the Belgian border.

CHAPTER II—Scarlett finds Sylvia Elven of the Odeon disguised as a peasant and carries her to La Trappe, where the countess and her friends are assembled.

CHAPTER III—All are arrested. The countess saves Scarlett from a fatal fall from the roof of the house. He denounces Buckhurst as the leader of the Reds and the countess conducts him to where Buckhurst is secreted.

CHAPTER IV—German Uhlans descend on the place and Buckhurst escapes during the melee. Scarlett is wounded.

CHAPTER V—He recovers consciousness in the countess' home at Morsbrunn, where he is cared for by the countess. A fierce battle is fought in the streets between French and Prussian soldiers.

CHAPTER VI—Buckhurst professes repentance and returns the crown jewels to Scarlett. He declares he will give himself up to the authorities. Scarlett doubts his sincerity. Buckhurst urges the countess to go to Paradise.

CHAPTER VII—Buckhurst admits that he receives pay from the Prussians for information which he does not give. He secures passports to the French lines for Scarlett, the countess and himself.

CHAPTER VIII—Scarlett reports to the secret service in Paris and finds Mornac, shadow of the emperor, in charge. He deposits the crown jewels and later, when making a detailed report, finds that pebbles have been substituted for the real stones. Speed, a courier in the secret service, also informs him that all the government treasure is being transported to the coast for shipment out of the country. Scarlett and Speed escape to join a circus.

CHAPTER IX—The circus arrives at Paradise where Scarlett secures a license from the mayor.

CHAPTER X—An order is received by the mayor calling the citizens to arms.

CHAPTER XI—Jacqueline, daughter of the Lizard, offers to join the circus to give exhibitions in the character of a mermaid.

CHAPTER XII—Scarlett makes friends with the Lizard.

CHAPTER XIII—Scarlett calls on the countess at her home in Paradise. He finds Sylvia Elven also there. He learns the countess has withdrawn from the socialists. They swear eternal friendship.

CHAPTER XIV—The Lizard learns for Scarlett, through one Tric-Trac, that Mornac is head of a communist conspiracy.

CHAPTER XV—Scarlett learns something of Sylvia Elven through a fellow performer named Kelly.

CHAPTER XVI—Orders regarding the treasure trains are changed owing to the discovery of a plot at Lorient.

CHAPTER XVII—Orders are received for the expulsion of the circus. Buckhurst appears in Paradise and secures recruits for the red flag. Scarlett admits he is in love with the countess.

CHAPTER XVIII—Scarlett is injured by the circus lions and taken to the home of the countess.

CHAPTER XIX—Preparations for the wrecking of the expected treasure train are discovered by Scarlett.

CHAPTER XX—Scarlett discovers Sylvia Elven sending a message to the Prussians. He sends warning of the plot to wreck the train and asks that a warship be dispatched to the port at once.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### Like Her Ancestors.

I leaned in the embrasure of the southern window, gazing at my lighted lanterns, which dangled from the halyards at Saint-Yves. The soldier Rolland had so far kept his word—three red lamps glimmered through a driving mist; the white lanterns hung above, faintly shining.

Full in the freelight of the room sat the young countess, lost in reverie, hands clasping the gilt arms of her chair. At her feet dozed Ange Pitou.

"I am afraid a story I have to tell is not going to be very cheerful," I said, "and I am also afraid that I must ask you to listen to it."

She met my eyes with composure, leaned a little toward me, and waited. And so, sitting there in the tinted glare, I told her of the death of Delmont and of Tavernier, and of Buckhurst's share in the miserable work.

"Madame, I am paining you," I said; "but I am going to cause you even greater unhappiness."

"Tell me what is necessary," she said, forming the words with tightened lips.

"Then I must tell you that it is necessary for Mademoiselle Elven to leave Trecoat tonight."

"Why?"

"It is better that I do not tell you, madame."

"Tell me. It is my right to know."

"Not now; later, if you insist."

"This is dreadful," she muttered.

"If I did not know you, I did not trust you so perfectly."

"Oh, are you certain she must go? It frightens me; it is so strange! I have grown fond of her."

"And now you say that she must go. I cannot understand—I cannot."

"No, you cannot understand," I repeated, gently; "but she can. It is a serious matter for Mademoiselle Elven; it could not easily be more serious. It is even perhaps a question of life or death, madame."



He Reloaded His Revolver.

when he entered the tearoom, Sylvia, white as a ghost, met him face to face. "Monsieur," she said, harshly, "why did you not come to that book store?"

He was silent. His face was answer enough—a terrible answer.

"Monsieur Eyre, speak to me! Is it true? Did they—did you not know that I made an error—that I did go on Monday at the same hour? They told me at the time that you had gone away—I thought you had forgotten—that you did not care—"

"Care!" he groaned, and bowed his head, crushing her hands over his face.

Then she broke down, breathless with terror and grief.

"I was not a spy then—truly I was not, Kelly. There was no harm in me—I only—only asked for the sketches because—because—I cared for you. I have them now; no soul save myself has ever seen them."

She raised her head and fumbled in her corse with shaking fingers, and drew from her bosom a packet of papers.

"Here are the sketches," she sobbed; "they have cost you dear! Now leave me—hate me! Let them come and take me—I do not want to live any more. Oh, what punishment on earth!"

Her suffering was unendurable to the man who had suffered through her; he turned on me, quivering in every limb.

"We must start," he said, hoarsely. "Give me your revolver."

"I drew it from my hip pocket and passed it to him.

him; the young countess stood in the hallway, bright-eyed, but composed, asking for me.

"The red and white lights are gone," she said. "There are four green lights on the tower and four blue lights on the halyards."

I turned to Eyre. "This is interesting," I said, grimly. "I set signals for the Fer-de-Lance to land in force. Somebody has changed them. You had better get ready to go."

Sylvia had shrunk away from Eyre. The countess looked at her blankly, then at me.

"Madame," I said, "there is little enough of happiness in the world—so little that when it comes it should be welcomed, even by those who may not share in it."

And I bent nearer and whispered the truth.

"Sylvia!" murmured the young countess, incredulously. "A spy! And she brings this—this shame on me!"

Sylvia turned, standing unsteadily. For a long time they looked at each other in silence, their eyes wet with tears. Then Eyre lifted Sylvia's hand and kissed it, and led her away, closing the door behind.

The countess still stood in the center of the room, transfixed, rigid, staring through her tears at the closed door. With a deep drawn breath she straightened her shoulders; her head drooped; she covered her face with clasped hands.

"What have I done?" she cried, brokenly—"what have I done that this shame should come upon me?"

"You have done nothing," I said, "neither for good nor evil in this crisis. But Sylvia has; Sylvia the spy. That a man should give up his life for a friend is good; that a woman offers hers for her country is better. She has done her duty; the sacrifice is all burning; I pray it may spare her and spare him."

The countess looked at me scornfully. "I think that we are not fitted to understand each other."

"It remains," I said, "for me to thank you for your kindness to us all, and for your generosity to me in my time of need. . . . It is quite useless for me to dream of repaying it. . . . I shall never forget it. . . . I ask leave to make my adieux, madame!"

She flushed to her temples, but did not answer.

As I stood looking at her, a vivid flare of light flashed through the window behind me, crimsoning the walls, playing over the ceiling with an infernal radiance. At the same instant the gate outside crashed open, a hubbub of voices swelled into a roar; and the outer doors were flung back and a score of men sprang into the hallway, soldiers with the red torch-light dancing on rifle barrels and bayonets.

And before them, revolver swinging in his slender hand, strode Buckhurst, a red sash tied across his breast, his colorless eyes like diamonds.

Speed and Jacqueline came hurrying through the hall to where I stood; Buckhurst's smile was awful as his eyes flashed from Speed to me.

Behind him, close to his shoulder, the torch-light fell on Mornac's smooth, false face, stretched now into a ferocious grimace; behind him crowded the soldiers of the commune, rifles slung, craning their unshaven faces to catch a glimpse of us.

"Buckhurst," I said, "what the devil do you mean by this foolery?" and I started for him, shouldering my way among his grotesque escort.

For an instant I looked into his deadly eyes; then he silently motioned me back; a dozen bayonets were leveled, forcing me to retire, inch by inch.

The Countess de Vassart was already in the hall, facing Buckhurst with perfect composure.

He turned and addressed us, suavely, bowing with a horrid, mock deference to the countess:

"In the name of the commune! The ci-devant Countess de Vassart is accused of sheltering the individual Scarlett, late inspector of imperial police; the individual Speed, ex-inspector of imperial gendarmes; the individual Eyre, under general suspicion; the woman called Sylvia Elven, a German spy. As war delegate of the commune, I am here to accuse!"

"I accuse the woman Sylvia Elven of communication with Prussian agents; of attempted corruption of soldiers under my command. I accuse the citoyenne Eline Trecoat, lately known as the Countess de Vassart, of aiding, encouraging and abetting these enemies of France!"

He waited until the short, fierce yell of approval had died away. Then:

"Call the soldier Rolland!" he said. My heart began to hammer in my throat. "I believe it's going hard with us," I muttered to Speed.

"Listen," he motioned.

I listened to the wretched creature Rolland while he told what had happened at the semaphore.

"You say he bribed you?" asked Buckhurst, gently.

"Yes; I've said it twenty times, haven't I?"

"And you took the bribes?"

The wretch laughed outright.

"And you believe that you deserve well of the commune?" smiled Buckhurst.

The soldier grined and opened his mouth to answer, and Buckhurst shot him through the face; and as he fell, shot him again, standing wreathed in the smoke of his own weapons.

"I think," said Buckhurst, in a pleasantly persuasive voice, "that there will be no more bribery in this battalion. He deliberately opened the smoking weapon; the spent shells dropped one by one from the cylinder, clinking on the stone floor.

"No—no more bribery," he mused, touching the dead man with the carefully polished toe of his shoe. "Because," he added, reloading his revolver, "I do not like it."

He turned quietly to Mornac and ordered the corpse to be buried, and Mornac plainly unnerred at the murder-

ous act of his superior, repeated the order, cursing his men to cover the quaver in his voice.

"As for you," observed Buckhurst, glancing up at us where we stood speechless together, "you will be judged and sentenced when this drum-head court decides. Go into that room!"

The countess did not move.

Speed touched her arm; she looked up quietly, smiled, and stepped across the threshold. Speed followed; Jacqueline slipped in beside him, and then I turned on Buckhurst, who had just ordered his soldiers to surround the house outside.

He motioned toward the door with leveled weapon. I turned and entered the tearoom, and he locked the door from the outside.

The countess, seated on the sofa, looked up as I appeared. She was terribly pale, but she smiled as my heavy eyes met hers.

"Is it to be farce or tragedy, monsieur?" she asked, without a tremor in her clear voice.

I could not have uttered a word to save my life. Speed, pacing the room, turned to read my face; and I think he read it, for he stopped short in his tracks.

"Do they mean to shoot us?" he asked, bluntly.

"Monsieur," said the countess, with a faint smile, "your whispers are no compliment to my race. Pray honor me by plain speaking. Are we to die?"

We stood absolutely speechless before her.

"Ah, Monsieur Scarlett," she said, gravely, "do you also fall me . . . at the end? . . . You, too—even you? . . . Must I tell you that we of Trecoat fear nothing in this world?"

"Are we to die?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

"Thank you," she said, softly. "Why do you look at me so sadly, Monsieur Scarlett? Truly, you must know that my life has been long enough to prove its uselessness. I had rather die with you than live without the friendship which I believe—which I know—is mine. You see I have nothing to regret in a death that brings me to you again. . . . Do you regret life?"

"Not now," I said.

"You are kind to say so. I believe—"

yes, I know that you truly care for me. . . . Do you?"

"Yes."

"Then it will not be hard. . . . Perhaps not even very painful."

The key turning in the door startled us. Buckhurst entered, and through the hallway I saw his disheveled soldiers running, flinging open doors, tearing, trampling, pillaging, wrecking everything in their path.

"Your business will be attended to in the garden at dawn," he observed, blinking about the room, for the bright lamp light dazzled him.

The countess did not even glance up as the sentence was pronounced; she looked at me and laid her left hand on mine, smiling, as though waiting for the moment to resume an interrupted conversation.

He went away, slamming and locking the door; and I heard Mornac complaining that the signals had gone out on the semaphore and that there was more treachery abroad.

"Get me a horse!" said Buckhurst. "There are plenty of them in the stables. Mornac, you stay here; I'll ride over to the semaphore."

"Where are you going?" demanded Mornac's angry voice. "Do you expect me to stay here while you start for Paris?"

"You have your orders," said Buckhurst, menacingly. "Silence, you fool. Do you obey orders or not?"

Their voices receded. Speed sprang to the door to listen, then ran back to the window.

"Scarlett," he whispered, "there are the lights of a vessel at anchor off Groix."

I was beside him in an instant. "It's the cruiser," I said. "Oh, Speed, for a chance to signal!"

Jacqueline, standing beside Speed, said quietly: "I could swim it. Wait. Raise the window a little."

She cautiously unlocked the window and peered out into the dark garden.

"The cliff falls sheer from the wall yonder," she whispered. "I shall try to drop. I learned much in the circus. I am not afraid, Speed. I shall drop into the sea."

"To your death," I said.

"Possibly, m'sieu. It is a good death, however. I am not afraid."

"Close the window," muttered Speed. "They'd shoot her from the wall, anyway."

Again the child gravely asked permission to try.

"No," said Speed, harshly, and turned away. But in that instant Jacqueline flung open the window and vaulted into the garden. Before I could realize what had happened she was a glimmering spot in the darkness. Then Speed and I followed her, running swiftly toward the foot of the garden, but we were too late; a slim, white shape rose from the top of the wall and leaped blindly out through the ruddy torch glare into the blackness beyond.

I looked at Speed. He stood wide-eyed, staring at vacancy.

"Could she do it?" I asked, horrified.

"God knows," he whispered.

Then we crept back to the window, where we entered in time to avoid discovery by a wretch who had succeeded in mounting the wall, torch in hand.

"Where is Jacqueline?" asked the countess, looking anxiously at the little blue skirt on Speed's knees. "Have they harmed that child?"

I told her.

A beautiful light grew in her eyes as she listened. "Did I not warn you that we Bretons know how to die?" she said.

There were noises outside our door, loud voices, hammering, the sound of furniture being dragged over stone

floors, and I scarcely noticed it when our door was opened again.

Then somebody called out our names; a file of half-drunken soldiers grounded arms in the passage way with a bang that brought us to our feet, as Mornac, flushed with wine, entered unsteadily, drawn sword in hand.

"I'm damned if I stay here any longer," he broke out, angrily. "I'll see whether my rascals can't shoot straight by torchlight."

The shuffling tread of the insurgent infantry echoed across the gravel court yard; torches behind the walls were extinguished; blackness enveloped the cliffs.

"Well," broke out Speed, hoarsely, "Good-by, Scarlett."

He held out his hand.

"Good-by," I said, stunned.

Then he went to the countess and offered his hand.

"I am so sorry for you," she said, with a pallid smile. "You have much to live for. But you must not feel lonely, monsieur; you will be with us—we shall be close to you."

She turned to me, and her hands fell to her side.

"Are you contented?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"I, too," she said, sweetly, and offered her hands. I held them very tightly. "You say," I whispered, "that it is not—love. But you do not speak for me, I love you."

A bright blush spread over brow and neck.

"So—it was love—after all," she said, under her breath. "God be with us today—I love you."

"March!" cried Mornac, as two soldiers took station beside me.

Speed passed out first; I followed; the countess came behind me.

"Courage," I stammered, looking back at her as we stumbled out into the torch-lit garden.

She smiled adorably. Her forefathers had mounted the guillotine smiling.

A soldier dressed like a Turco lifted a torch and set it in the flower bed under the wall, illuminating the spot where we were to stand. As this soldier turned to come back I saw his face.

"Salah Ben-Ahmed!" I cried, hoarsely. "Do Marabouts do this butcher's work?"

The Turco stared at me as though stunned.

"Salah Ben-Ahmed is a disgraced soldier!" I said, in a ringing voice.

"It's a lie!" he shouted, in Arabic. "It's a lie, O my inspector! Speak! Have these men tricked me? Are you not Prussians?"

"Silence! Silence!" bawled Mornac. "Turco, fall in! Fall in, I say! What! You menace me?" he snarled, cocking his revolver.

Then a man darted out of the red shadows of the torch-light and fell upon Mornac with a knife, and dragged him down and rolled on him, stabbing him through and through, while the mutilated wretch screamed and screamed until his soul struggled out through the flame-shot darkness and fled to its last dreadful abode.

The Lizard rose, shaking his fagot knife; they fell upon him, clubbing and stabbing with stock and bayonet, but he swung his armoured and sticky blade, clearing a circle around him. And I think he could have cut his way free had not Tric-Trac shot him in the back of the head.

Then a frightful tumult broke loose. Three of the torches were knocked to the ground and trampled out as the insurgents, doubly drunken with wine and the taste of blood, seized me and tried to force me against the wall; but the Turco, with his shrill, wolf-like battle yell, attacked them, sabre-bayonet in hand. Speed, too, had wrested a rifle from a half-stupefied ruffian, and now stood at bay before the countess; I saw him wielding his heavy weapon like a fall; then in the darkness Tric-Trac shot at me, so close that the powder flame scorched my leg. He dropped his rifle to spring for my throat, knocking me flat, and, crouching on me, strove to strangle me; and I heard him whining with eagerness while I twisted and writhed to free my windpipe from his thin fingers.

At last I tore him from my body and struggled to my feet. He, too, was on his legs with a bound, running, doubling, dodging; and at his heels I saw a dozen sailors, broadaxes glittering, chasing him from tree to shrub.

"Speed!" I shouted—"the sailors from the Fer-de-Lance!"

I had picked up a rifle with a broken bayonet; the countess, clasping my left arm, stood swaying in the rifle smoke, eyes closed; and, when a horrid screeching arose from the depths of the garden where they were destroying Tric-Trac, she fell to shuddering, hiding her face on my shoulder.

Suddenly Speed appeared, carrying a drunken little figure, partly wrapped in a sailor's pea-jacket, slim limbs drooping, blue with cold.

"Put out that fire in there," he said, hoarsely; "we must get her into bed. Hurry, for God's sake, Scarlett! There's nobody in the house!"

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline! brave little Bretonne," murmured the countess, bending forward and gathering the unconscious child into her strong, young arms.

A fresh company of sailors passed on the double, rifles trailing, their officer shouting encouragement. And as we came in view of the semaphore, I saw the signal tower on fire from base to top. The marines fired steadily from the windows above us.

"They want the Red Terror!" laughed the sailors. "They shall have it!"

Blackened, scorched, almost suffocated, I staggered back to the tearoom, where the countess stood clasping Jacqueline, huddled in a blanket, and smoothing the child's wet curls away from a face as white as death.

Together we carried her back

through the smoking hallway, up the stairs to my bedroom, and laid her in the bed.

The child opened her eyes as we drew the blankets.

"Where is Speed?" she asked, dreamily.

A moment later he came in, and she turned her head languidly and smiled.

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline!" he whispered, bending close above her.

"Do you love me, Speed?"

"Ah, Jacqueline," he stammered, "more than you can understand."

Later that night the light cavalry from Lorient rode into Paradise. At



Stabbing Him Through and Through.

dawn the colonel, established in the mayory, from whence its foolish occupant had fled, sent for Speed and me, and when we reported he drew from his heavy dolman our commissions, restoring us to rank and pay in the regiment de marche which he commanded.

At sunrise I had bade good-by to the sweetest woman on earth; at noon we were miles to the westward, riding like demons on Buckhurst's heavy trail.

I am not sure that we ever saw him again, though once, weeks later, Speed and I and a dozen hussars gave chase to a mounted man near St. Brievre, and that man might have been Buckhurst. He led us a magnificent chase straight to the coast, where we rode plump into a covey of Prussian hussars, who were standing on their saddles, hacking away at the telegraph wires with their heavy, curved sabers.

That was our first and last sight of the enemy in either Prussian or communist guise, though in the long, terrible days and nights of that winter of '71, when three French armies froze, and the white death, not the Prussians, ended all for France, rumors of insurrection came to us from the starving capital, and we heard of the red flag flying on the Hotel-de-Ville, and the rising of the carbiniers under Flourens; and some spoke of the leader of the insurrection and called him John Buckhurst.

Then, for three blank, bitter months, freezing and starving, the First regiment de marche of Lorient Hussars stood guard at Brest over the diamonds of the crown of France.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### The Secret.

The news of the collapse of the army of the East found our wretchedly clothed and half-starved hussars still patrolling the environs of Brest from Belair to the Pont Tournant, and from the banks of the Elorn clear around the ramparts to Lannion bay.

For three months our troops scarcely left their saddles, except to be taken to the hospital in Recouvrance.

Suddenly the nightmare ended with a telegram. Paris had surrendered.

On the first day of March, by papers from London, we learned that the war was at an end, and that the preliminary treaty of Sunday, the 26th, had been signed at Versailles.

The same mail brought to me an astonishing offer from Cairo, to assist in the reorganization and accept a commission in the Egyptian military police. Speed and I, shivering in our ragged uniforms by the barrack stove, discussed the matter over a loaf of bread and a few sardines, until we fell asleep in our greasy chairs.

When I awoke